

## ***Och Aye! Understanding Weird Scottish Words and Phrases***

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### **INTRODUCTION**

“Tir gun chàinain, tir gun anam.”

Scottish Gaelic saying meaning, “A land without a language is a land without a soul.”

The Scots Tongue, v.

### **THE HISTORIC LANGUAGES OF SCOTLAND**

Pictish

Gaelic

Northumbrian Old English → Scots

Cumbric/Cumbrian

Norse

### **SCOTTISH GAELIC**

Scottish Gaelic is a Celtic language native to Scotland. It is a member of the Goidelic branch of the Celtic languages. Scottish Gaelic, like Modern Irish and Manx, developed out of Middle Irish.

Wikipedia, History of Scottish Gaelic

Gaelic came to Scotland with the Irish tribe the Scoti who arrived in Scotland and created the kingdom of Dál Riata in the 4th and 5th centuries.

By the 10th century, Gaelic had become the dominant language throughout northern and western Scotland in the Gaelo-Pictic Kingdom of Alba.

Gaelic began to be eclipsed as the dominant language during the reign of Malcolm III “Canmore” under the influence of his wife, Margaret of Wessex. In either 1068 or 1070, he married exiled Princess Margaret of Wessex who spoke no Gaelic, gave her sons Anglo-Saxon names rather than Gaelic names, and brought a large number of English to the Scottish court. Among these English included Norman families from the north of England – Bruce, Baliol, Grant, Fraser.

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 46

After Malcolm’s death, the Gaelic nobles backed his brother Donald Bàn rather than his sons. The sons fled to the English court and in 1097 returned with an Anglo-Norman army. Donald was overthrown, blinded, and cast into prison. He is considered the “last Celtic king of Scotland.”

Wikipedia, History of Scottish Gaelic

Gaelic is considered [of the two languages of Gaelic and Scots] the most venerable, most expressive, the most beautiful. It is also a dying language and has been declining for centuries.

## SCOTS

Scots is recognized as an indigenous language of Scotland.

“A remarkable number of people, including many Scots themselves, have a hazy notion of what constitutes the Scots language.”  
The Concise Scots Dictionary, p. vii

Scots is a West Germanic language variety spoken in Scotland and parts of Ulster.

Germanic languages:

North Germanic – Icelandic, Faroese, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish

West Germanic – Scots, English, Frisian, Dutch, Low German, German

Wikipedia, Scots Language

“Unlike Gaelic and English, Scots and English are closely related. They are complimentary—two branches of the same tree which nevertheless express very different world pictures.”

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 41

Modern Scots is a sister language of Modern English. The two languages diverged in the Early Middle English period (1250-1300).

Wikipedia, Scots Language

Scots was brought into Scotland by the Northumbrians.

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 46

Between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries contacts between Scotland and the Low Countries resulted in the large number of Dutch and Flemish words added to the Scots language.

The Concise Scots Dictionary, p. xv

In 1424, the stature of Scots was confirmed when it replaced Latin as the official language recording the statutes of the Scottish Parliament. From then on, Scots was the official language of state used for official records, administration, etc.

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 50

Scots is sometimes called Lowland Scots to differentiate from Scottish Gaelic.

Alternate names for Scots include:

Borders

Braid Scots (Broad Scots in English)

Inglis (name of Anglo-Saxon – Angle-ish)

Lallans (meaning “Lowlands” & non-Gaelic speaking)

Mither Tongue (Mother Tongue in English)

Scotch

Ullans (merging Ulster and Lallans refers to Scots spoken in Ulster, Ireland)

The Scots language in Scotland consists of four main dialects:

Insular

Northern

Central

Southern

### Insular

The dialect of the Northern Isles, it is spoken on the Orkney and Shetland Islands. It differs significantly from the other dialects because of the recent and profound influence that the Norse language exercised there.

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 194

### Northern

This dialect stretches from East Angus and the Mearns in the South to Caithness in the north and includes the northeast, Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. "More than any other city, Aberdeen maintains close links with its hinterland."

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 189

### Central

This dialect stretches from West Angus and Northeast Perthshire in the north, to Galloway and Ulster in the southwest and the River Tweed in the southeast. The dialect can be divided into three sub-divisions:

South Central Scots – West Dumfries, Galloway, Ulster, etc.

West Central Scots – Glaswegian dominates this area

East Central Scots – This dialect is most similar to early court Scots.

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 177

### Southern

This is also known as Border Scots and is spoken in the counties of Roxburgh, Selkirk, and East Dumfriesshire. Apart from the old "Debatable Ground" where Scots and Cumbrian dialects mix, the dialects spoken on either side of the border are markedly different.

This dialect has noticeably different sounds from the other Scots dialects.

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 186

Modern authorities agree that the Scots language was gradually eclipsed after the adoption of the Protestant English Bible during the Scottish reformation and later because of the institutional dominance of southern English centered in London following the Union of the Crowns in 1603 and the Act of Union in 1707.

Scotticism

## SCOTTISH GAELIC VOCABULARY

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Athair          | father, progenitor, or sire  |
| Baisteach       | baptismal, baptism (sàcramaid a' bhaistidh = sacrament of baptism) |
| Bothan, Bothy   | a hut, often an illegal drinking place                             |
| Clachan         | a small village or hamlet, usually with a church                   |
| Clann           | children or family   |
| Dun, Dum        | from dun, a fort – like Dunbar, Dundee, Dunedin, Dumfries          |
| Fillibeg        | from fèileadh beag, a small kilt (modern kilt)                     |
| Filliemor       | from fèileadh mor, big kilt or big wrap                            |
| Gillie          | a boy or type of servant   |
| Kil             | from cill, a churchyard – like Kilbride                            |
| Leanabh-mic     | a son, boy-child   |
| Leanabh-nighinn | a daughter, girl-child (neaghin = lass; irinn, irghinn = girl)     |
| Màthair         | mother   |
| Mod             | from mòd, a festival, assembly, or court                           |
| Och             | Irish and Scottish exclamation of regret, sorrow or longing        |
| Oe              | from ogha, grandchild  |

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Paraiste, Parraist | a parish                                    |
| Pòsadh             | marriage, act of marrying                   |
| Pòsadh-bliadhna    | hand-fasting                                |
| Sean Taigh         | an old house                                |
| Sodger             | from saighdear, a soldier                   |
| Tack & Tacksman    | from Scots tak and Old Norse taka, a lessee |
| Teaghlach          | a family or household                       |
| Tiomnadh           | a will or testament                         |
| Tocher             | from tachartas, dowry                       |
| Uachdaran          | a laird, landowner, landlord, or proprietor |

## SCOTS VOCABULARY

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Aith                     | oath  |
| Amerced                  | fined or mulcted  |
| Americament              | a penalty inflicted   |
| Anent                    | about, concerning   |
| Aye                      | yes   |
| Bairn                    | a young child, to impregnate  |
| Bapteese, Bapteosed      | baptize, baptized   |
| Bastart                  | bastard   |
| Birlie, Birlie-coort     | a court of country neighbours to settle local concerns                  |
| Brede, Bride             | bride   |
| Bridegruim               | bridegroom  |
| Brither                  | brother   |
| Buiry, Buirit, Buiried   | bury, buried  |
| Cludgie                  | toiler  |
| Come-o-will              | an illegitimate child   |
| Coort                    | a court   |
| Cottar                   | a tenant farmer   |
| Craft, Crafter           | croft, crofter or smallholder   |
| Deforce                  | resistance to an officer of the law in the execution of his duty        |
| Disponed                 | legally made over or conveyed to another                                |
| Dochter                  | daughter  |
| Dinnae                   | don't   |
| Faither, Faider          | father  |
| Fee                      | to hire the services of a farm laborer or servant                       |
| Fermtoun                 | farm town, a small village usually without a church                     |
| Fee                      | to hire the services of a farmer laborer or servant                     |
| Feu                      | a possession held on payment of a certain annual rent in grain or money |
| Feuar                    | a person holding a feu  |
| Feu-Ferme/Farm           | a mode of possessing land   |
| Frae                     | from  |
| Hae                      | have  |
| Haund-fest, Haund-festin | hand-fasting, betrothal, trial marriage                                 |
| Heir Portioner           | one of the co-heirs who inherits part of a divided property             |
| Heritor                  | a landholder in a parish  |
| Husband Land             | a division of land containing 26 acres                                  |
| Huvnae                   | haven't   |

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Ilk                         | n. family, race, sort, kind<br>adj. each, every, same<br>also, having a surname the same as the place of residence   |
| Isna                        | is not   |
| Isnae                       | isn't  |
| Juist                       | just   |
| Kirk                        | church   |
| Lairdskip                   | the estate of a laird, a landed estate, a property and also the position of a laird, a lairdship or lordship   |
| Leeve aff                   | lives on   |
| Leeves                      | lives at   |
| Leevin                      | a holding of land, a farm or estate  |
| Luve-bairn                  | an illegitimate child  |
| Maid bairn                  | girl child   |
| Main bairn                  | boy child  |
| Merrit, Mairrit, Waddit     | married  |
| Messuage                    | a dwelling house with its adjacent buildings and lands appropriated to the use of the household  |
| Mither                      | mother   |
| Mither-leid                 | mother tongue  |
| Nane                        | none   |
| Noo                         | now  |
| Oor                         | our  |
| Pairish, Pairishen          | a parish   |
| Pochle                      | to commit fraud  |
| Portioner                   | one who possesses part of a property that had been originally divided among co-heirs   |
| Quair                       | a number of printed or written pages bound together  |
| Quairfoir                   | wherefor   |
| Quat                        | forsake, give up, requite  |
| Quha                        | who  |
| Quhair                      | where  |
| Quhalm                      | a qualm or uneasy feeling of doubt   |
| Quhilk, Quilk, Qwilk, Whilk | which  |
| Quhon                       | a few  |
| Quine                       | a girl [used in northeast Scotland]  |
| Quwh                        | such as who  |
| Sasine, Seisin, Seizin      | the act of giving legal possession of property and the instrument (document) by which such possession is proved. Seizin was originally not an estate, but a way to gain one, as by adverse possession. This is rooted in the Roman legal concept that whoever worked the land should be its owner. |
| Seised, Seized              | given possession of legal property by legal authority  |
| Set yersel' up o' sasines   | register of sasines  |
| Siclike                     | likewise   |
| Skiver                      | a lazy person  |
| Scran                       | food   |
| Screivit                    | written  |
| Stramash                    | a brawl  |
| Tae                         | to   |
| Telt                        | told   |

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Testifeecate               | a solemn declaration of fact put in writing; to bear witness, testify                    |
| Thon                       | that   |
| Umquhile, Unquhile, Umquil | a common word used in testaments meaning deceased - former, the deceased, late, formerly |
| Wain                       | a child  |
| Weemen, Weemen-fowk        | women, female relatives  |
| Wha                        | who  |
| Wheesht                    | quiet  |
| Whit                       | what   |
| Widnae                     | would not  |
| Ye                         | you  |
| Yer                        | your   |
| Yon                        | that   |

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